



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Council President Phil Andrews

March 19, 2009

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Montgomery Council President Andrews, County Executive Leggett Urge Support of Campaign Finance Disclosure Bill

*House Bill 825 Would Allow More Stringent Requirements
For Montgomery Than Are Required by Maryland Law*

ROCKVILLE, Md., March 19, 2009—Montgomery County Council President Phil Andrews (D-District 3) and County Executive Isiah Leggett this week sent a letter to Maryland State Delegate Sheila Hixson, chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, urging favorable consideration of House Bill 825 that would enable Montgomery County to enact more stringent campaign finance disclosure requirements for County elections than are required by State law. HB 825 is sponsored by Delegate Susan Lee.

The letter states that as a result of the bill “the public's understanding of campaign financing would be much more complete—rather than more fragmented—and it would be much less challenging than it is now for the public to obtain such information.”

The complete text of the letter:

March 16, 2009

Honorable Sheila Hixson
Chair Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

We are writing to urge favorable consideration of HB 825—the bill sponsored by Del. Susan Lee that would enable Montgomery County to enact campaign finance disclosure requirements for Montgomery County elections that are more stringent than State law.

This needed and common-sense bill was approved by unanimous votes in both the Montgomery County House and Senate delegations, and has been endorsed by the County Executive, the County Council, the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, Common Cause of Maryland, Progressive Maryland, the Montgomery County Civic Federation, and Progressive Neighbors. These entities recognize that one size of campaign finance disclosure law does not fit all.

It is astounding that the State Board of Elections stated in its written testimony that "the public's access to campaign finance reports would be fragmented and more challenging" if HB 825 were adopted. To the contrary, the bill is explicit that Montgomery County could only use the authority in HB 825 to expand the public's access to campaign finance information by enacting measures that supplement or that is more stringent than State law. For example, a report could be required between January and August of an election year, and occupational and employer disclosure could be required of large individual contributors to help the public identify patterns of giving. As a result, the public's understanding of campaign financing would be much more complete—rather than more fragmented—and it would be much less challenging than it is now for the public to obtain such information.

The Board also wrote that the bill “could result in Montgomery County Board of Elections having to develop and administer electronic filing software, hire specialized staff and other administrative duties related to campaign finance compliance.” However, the Board failed to note that Montgomery County—not the State—would be responsible for the cost of these measures if they became necessary. HB 825 would have no fiscal impact on the State.

Thank you again for your consideration. On behalf of the Montgomery County, we urge a favorable vote on HB 825.

Phil Andrews
President
Montgomery County Council

Isiah Leggett
County Executive
Montgomery County